

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan and proposed Critical Habitat

Upper Columbia River Recovery Unit (CHAPTER 22)

What areas are included in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit?

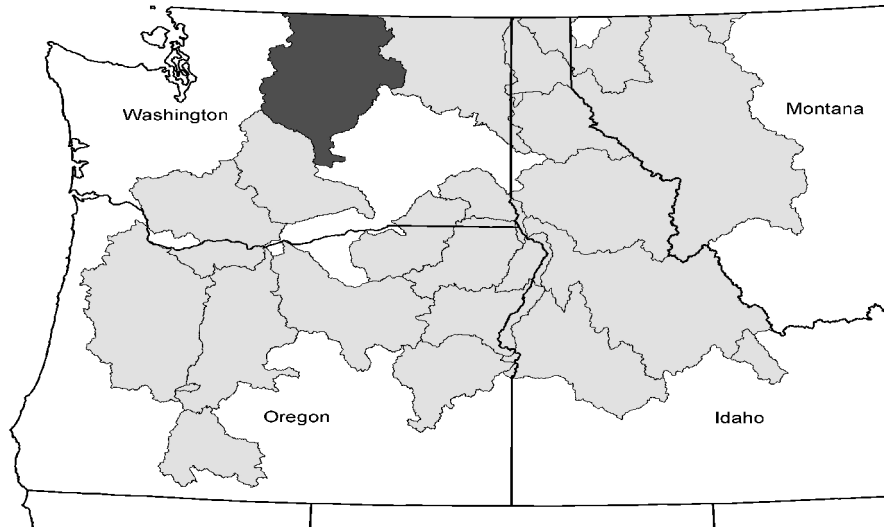
The Upper Columbia River Recovery Unit Team identified three core areas including the mainstem and tributaries of the Wenatchee, Entiat, and Methow rivers. This unit is located in central and northern Washington on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

A total of 232 miles of stream and 1,279 acres of lakes and reservoirs are proposed as critical habitat in this area. This is only 5 percent of the total recovery unit.

Who developed the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in



biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and

knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft recovery plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of the species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint

providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

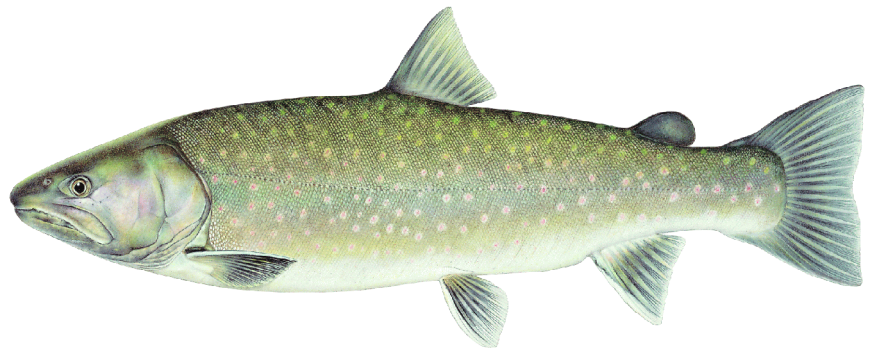
The primary effect of the critical habitat designation is that Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners,

that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).



What is the status of bull trout in the Upper Columbia River Recovery Unit?

Upper Columbia River bull trout were listed as threatened in 1998. The Wenatchee River has bull trout dispersed throughout the basin, with the strongest populations centered around Lake Wenatchee and the Chiwawa River.

Bull trout are found in the Entiat River up to Entiat Falls, with the primary known spawning areas occurring in the middle reaches of the Mad River. Migratory bull trout persist in the Methow River; the largest populations occur in the Twisp River, Wolf Creek, West Fork Methow River and the Lost River. The overall status and distribution of resident bull trout within the Methow River basin is unknown. Bull trout have recently been found using the mainstem Columbia River, most likely for feeding, overwintering, and migration.

The Lake Chelan basin is historic bull trout habitat, but their presence has not been documented since the late 1950's, and they may have been extirpated from the basin. Complete surveys in remote tributary reaches of the Lake Chelan basin have not been conducted, however, and

further investigation is needed.

Bull trout are known to occur in the Okanogan River in British Columbia (McPhail and Carveth 1992). While there are anecdotal reports on bull trout occurrence in the Okanogan River (United States portion), the current distribution within the Okanogan basin is unknown. The Upper Columbia Recovery Unit Team recommends that expanded surveys be conducted in each basin to verify status and distribution.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit?

Within the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit, historic and current land use activities have impacted bull trout local populations. Some of the historic activities, especially water diversions, hydropower development, forestry, and agriculture within the core areas, may have significantly reduced important fluvial populations. Lasting effects from some, but not all, of these early land and water developments still act to limit bull trout production in core areas. Threats from current activities are also present in all core areas of the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery

plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' native range, so that the species can be delisted. To achieve this goal the following objectives have been identified for bull trout in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit:

- * Maintain current distribution of bull trout and restore distribution in previously occupied areas within the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit.
- * Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of bull trout.
- * Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life history stages and strategies.
- * Conserve genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measure according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in each core area. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

Distribution criteria will be met when bull trout are distributed among at least 16 local populations in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit. The 16 identified local

populations are currently distributed within the Wenatchee, Entiat and Methow core areas and are comprised of the migratory life-history form. For recovery to occur, the distribution of these migratory local populations should be maintained, while abundance is increased.

Abundance criteria will be met when the estimated abundance of bull trout among all local populations in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit (Wenatchee, Entiat, and Methow core areas) is between 6,322 and 10,426 migratory fish. Recovered abundance ranges for the Wenatchee (1,876 to 3,176), Entiat (836 to 1,364), and Methow (3,610 to 5,886) core areas were derived using the professional judgement of the Team and estimation of productive capacity of identified local populations. Resident life history forms are not included in this estimate, but are considered a research need. As more data is collected, recovered population estimates will be revised to more accurately reflect both the migratory and resident life history components.

Trend criteria will be met when adult bull trout exhibit a stable or increasing trend for at least two generations at or above the recovered abundance level within

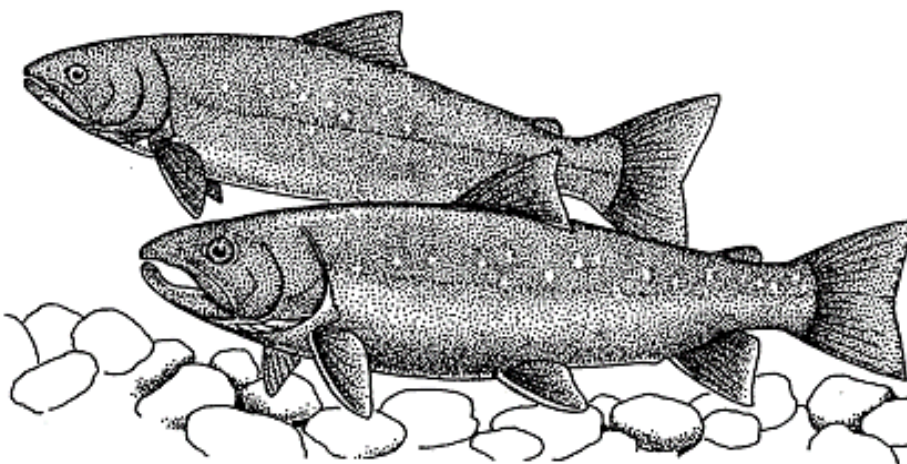
the Wenatchee, Entiat, and Methow core areas. The development of a standardized monitoring and evaluation program that would accurately describe trends in bull trout abundance is identified as a priority research need.

Connectivity criteria will be met when specific barriers to bull trout migration in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit have been addressed. The Upper Columbia Recovery Unit Team recommends that to adequately address habitat problems in the Methow core area (*e.g.*, low instream flows, grazing, culverts, and diversion dam barriers), and to recover bull trout, basin-wide conservation efforts (*e.g.*, Habitat Conservation Plans) must be developed and implemented.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service working with Federal, State, and private entities, and in coordination with local governments, needs to secure quality habitat conditions for bull trout. These efforts should be coordinated with ongoing National Marine Fisheries Service salmon recovery actions to avoid duplication in planning and implementation.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Upper Columbia River Recovery Unit?

Recommended recovery efforts build on the conservation measures already taking place in this recovery unit. The Entiat and Mad Rivers are classified as "key watersheds" under the Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan. Road restoration work has been on- going in the watershed, particularly in the mainstem and headwaters of Mad River tributaries. Stocking of hatchery trout has stopped in the mainstem Wenatchee and Entiat rivers. Specifically, there is no longer an active stocking program for brook trout within the



basins. Currently, timber management on U.S. Forest Service lands is guided by several land management plans. The Northwest Forest Plan is implemented in the Wenatchee and Entiat rivers, and the west half of the Methow River (USFS and BLM 1994). Land management activities relative to bull trout in the eastern half of the Methow River are guided by standards contained in INFISH (USFS 1995e). These strategies are overlaid with on-site forest management plans that, when implemented, are designed to reduce impacts to aquatic species, riparian areas, and listed fish.

Other strategies generally consist of enhancing habitat, eliminating barriers and revegetating riparian zones; reducing sediment to streams and reducing timber harvest within riparian zones. More details are available in the full text of the Upper Columbia River Recovery Unit chapter in the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan.

How long will recovery take?

The time required to achieve recovery depends on bull trout status, factors affecting bull trout, implementation and effectiveness of recovery tasks, and responses to recovery tasks. A tremendous amount of work will be required to restore impaired habitat, reconnect habitat, and eliminate threats from nonnative species. Three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years), or possibly longer, may be necessary before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting. Degradation and fragmentation of bull trout habitat in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit have resulted in populations that are at

high risk. Ultimately, these threats must be addressed in the near future if recovery is to be achieved. If identified actions are implemented, the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit Team anticipates that recovery could occur within 25 to 50 years.

How much will recovery cost?

Total estimated cost of bull trout recovery in the Upper Columbia Recovery Unit is \$15 million. Total costs include estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State, and Federal governments and private business and individuals. The estimate includes recovery actions associated with the Wenatchee, Entiat, and Methow core areas as well as identified research needs (*e.g.*, Columbia River). These costs are attributed to bull trout conservation, but other aquatic species will also benefit. Cost estimates are not provided for tasks which are normal agency responsibilities under existing authorities.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at www.species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fwlsrbcomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

A public information meeting and hearing are scheduled in Wenatchee, WA at the West Coast Wenatchee Center Hotel, 201 North Wenatchee Ave, January 7, 2003. The information meeting will be from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The formal public hearing will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

***This is only a brief summary.
Please see full draft recovery plan
and critical habitat proposal for
complete details***